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The Bunji plain now holds but a small fort, commanding the ferry six hundred feet below, and a patch of cultivation. It only wants water brought on to it to make it blossom like the rose. But the climate is not pleasant; the heat in summer all down the Indus valley is very great; 125° in tents is not uncommon in May. We found our camp very hot, as our tents were little double-fly tents, seven or eight feet square, just high enough for a tall man to stand up in with a few inches to spare. Our servants, orderlies, and guard were in single-fly sepoys' tents, and we were all thankful for the shade of a few trees. We visited the fort, which stood on the edge of a great ravine leading into the Indus, surrounded on two sides up to the very walls by fruit-trees, under which some hundreds of Kashmiri irregular troops were now camped. All the arrangements for water-supply, magazines, and commissariat were of the vaguest.

At Astor we had begun to hear rumours of the heavy losses the Kashmir troops and coolies who had preceded us had suffered crossing the passes, pushed through as they had been in the early spring. Here we heard more details of losses by snow, and now the losses from cholera, dysentery, and other diseases incidental to bad food, over-work, and no sanitary or medical arrangements, began to be evident.

We crossed the river next day. It was running three hundred yards wide, a very mill race, with huge waves boiling over deep hidden rocks in the centre of its course. We crossed on a large raft, about eight feet by ten, made of a light framework of wood and bamboo, floated on half-a-dozen inflated

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133 bullock skins. It was a most exhilarating perform-
● 50/ ance; once you had pushed out from the shore and began rowing, the raft was caught in the stream, and went dancing madly down, tossed in all directions by the waves, the men pulling for their lives so as to avoid being swept past the landing-place and through the heavy rapids below. A few minutes of racing down-stream, and you pulled into quieter water on the opposite side, some hundreds of yards lower down than you started. All our kit, guard, etc., crossed in the boats, a much more dangerous performance, unless most carefully watched, for the Kashmir officials had never realised that the flat-bottomed boats, suitable to the navigation of the Woollar Lake, and of the quiet upper reaches of the Jhelum, were not fitted to the roaring stream
[731] of the Indus in flood. Consequently, year by year, they continued to build slab-sided flat-bottomed boats, and to man them with unfortunate impressed Kashmiri boatmen, accustomed to use a futile heart-shaped paddle instead of an oar; the natural result was that every year, as a rule, there was a disaster, and twenty to thirty men drowned. The local officials did not even trouble to select the best place for a ferry; there were far better places a little up the stream. A Kashmir officer, while the arrangements for crossing were being made, explained to us the advantages of the rafts, and thoughtfully remarked: "The boat is very dangerous; we will not go in it ourselves, but send the coolies and guard." I crossed often afterwards by boat, but it was most unpleasant, and with a lot of men and horses
000 in it, really unsafe. There were the usual casualties